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FIELD RESEARCH

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING, DESIGN, ART AND TECHNOLOGY. (CEDAT)

MARGARET TROWELL SCHOOL OF INDUSTRIAL AND FINE ART. (MTSIFA)

THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM ON CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART FORM IN UGANDA.

A CASE STUDY FROM BUGANDA KINGDOM CULTURE THE USE OF BANANA FIBRES TO MAKE CRAFTS SPECIFICALLY DOLLS.

BY

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DECLARATION

I NYANGO RONALD POLYCARP, declare that this research proposal is my original work, conducted by me and has never been submitted to any University for any academic award.

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……

DATE……
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APPROVAL

This research has been submitted for examination with my approval as the University supervisor.

SUPERVISOR'S NAME: **MS.BABIRYE ANGELLA**

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DEDICATION

This work is lovingly dedicated to my father, Boyi Nyango Polycarp, whose guidance and resilience have always inspired me; to my mother, Naggayi Christine, for her unwavering love, prayers, and support; and to myself, for the perseverance, discipline, and belief that have carried me through every step of this journey.

May this be a reflection of your sacrifice and a foundation for greater things ahead.

ACKNOWLEGDEMENT

First and foremost, I thank the Almighty God for the gift of life, strength, and wisdom that have sustained me throughout this academic journey. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor for their invaluable guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback that shaped this research into its current form. To my beloved parents, Boyi Nyango Polycarp and Naggayi Christine, thank you for your endless support, prayers, and sacrifices. Your belief in me has been my greatest motivation. I also appreciate my friends, lecturers, and colleagues at Makerere University, Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts, for their inspiration, collaboration, and shared insights that enriched my academic growth.

Lastly, I acknowledge myself or the courage, effort, and consistency invested in this work. This milestone is not the end, but a reflection of progress, growth, and purpose.

DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

Colonialism: The practice of establishing political control over another territory and its people to extend one's own power and interests.

Traditional Art Forms: Artistic expressions and practices that are deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of a community, often passed down through generations.

Banana Fiber Dolls: Traditional dolls made from banana fibers, often used for pedagogical purposes and cultural expression in Buganda, Uganda.

Buganda Kingdom: A kingdom located in central Uganda, with a rich cultural history and traditional art forms.

Cultural Heritage: The customs, traditions, and artistic expressions that are inherited from past generations and are considered valuable to a community.

Artisan: Skilled craftspeople who create traditional art forms, such as banana fiber dolls.

Eurocentric Lens: A perspective that interprets African art and culture through European values and standards, often marginalizing indigenous practices.

Pedagogical Purposes: The use of art or other means to teach or educate, often used in the context of traditional art forms.

Thematic Analysis: A method of analyzing qualitative data by identifying, coding, and categorizing themes or patterns.

Triangulation: The use of multiple data sources, methods, or researchers to validate findings and increase the reliability of research.

Purposive Sampling: A non-probability sampling method that selects participants based on their relevance to the research question or objective.

In-depth Interview: A qualitative data collection method that involves detailed, open-ended questions to gather personal accounts and experiences.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): A qualitative data collection method that involves group discussions to explore communal perspectives and experiences.

Participant Observation: A qualitative data collection method that involves observing and participating in the daily activities of a community or group to gather data.

Document Review: A qualitative data collection method that involves analyzing existing documents, such as literature, reports, and archival materials, to gather data.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UNESCO:	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
NGOs:	Non-Government Organization.
FGDs:	Focused Group Discussions.
MTSIFA:	Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art

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CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The intersection of colonial history and indigenous creative practices has profoundly reshaped the artistic landscape of Uganda. This research explores the evolution of Buganda Kingdom's material culture, specifically focusing on the transition of **banana fibre dolls** from functional play objects to symbolic motifs in contemporary Ugandan painting. By examining how these traditional artifacts have moved from the hands of children into the galleries of fine artists, this study highlights the enduring legacy of colonial disruption and the subsequent efforts toward cultural reclamation.

1.1 Background.

In the pre-colonial era, the **Buganda Kingdom** possessed a rich tapestry of craftsmanship deeply rooted in its natural environment. The banana, central to Ganda life as a food source, also provided the raw materials for clothing, housing, and art. Among these were banana fibre dolls organic, tactile objects crafted by elders or children themselves. These dolls were more than mere toys; they were tools for socialization, reflecting the community’s values, kinship structures, and gender roles.

However, the onset of British colonial rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries introduced a systematic shift in Ugandan aesthetics. The colonial education system and the introduction of Western-style "Fine Art" prioritised European mediums like oil on canvas and academic realism, often dismissing indigenous crafts as "primitive" or "fetishistic."

Figure 1: Experimental figurative studies produced during studio based learnig, showcasing the manipulation of organic local materials into anthropomorphic structure**.**

The banana fiber dolls traditional is not only a testament of the creativity and skill of Buganda artisans but also plays a vital role in preserving the culture of Buganda identity artists like Yiga Joshua have come up to preserve dolls through using dolls as figures to communicate messages, he treats dolls not just as toys, but as symbols of procreation, parenthood and the intersection of childhood.

Figure 2:Joshua Yiga meticulously applies fine details to a canvas feathering the stylized silhouettes of traditional banana fibre dolls, bridging the gap between Ugandan cultural heritage and contemporary fine art.

Acaye Kerunen is a world-renowned multimedia artist who represented Uganda at the 59th Venice Biennale. She works extensively with local fibers, including banana stalks and leaves, to create large-scale installations.

The Work: While she creates abstract wall hangings and installations, her work is a direct elevation of "women’s craft." She utilizes the same weaving techniques used to make traditional dolls and mats, repurposing them into high art.

Themes: Her work centers on environmental stewardship and the labor of Ugandan women, transforming functional "craft" materials into conceptual masterpieces.

Figure 3:Acaye Kerunen, *Waani Ee!*, 2021, mixed media, 55 x 41 x 33 cm (21 5/8 x 16 1/8 x 13 in.) © Acaye Kerunen

Ronald Luwukya is a specialist in banana fiber mosaic. Rather than using paint, he uses different shades of dried banana fibers to "paint" intricate scenes.

The Work: He often depicts traditional Ugandan life, and the banana fiber doll frequently appears as a subject in his portraits of children or domestic scenes.

Technique: By stripping the fiber into different textures and tones (from deep browns to pale creams), he creates a 3D effect on canvas that mirrors the physical texture of the dolls themselves.

Figure 4: By masterfully manipulating the same organic materials used to craft traditional Ugandan dolls, Ronald Luwukya transforms raw banana fibers into a sophisticated

mosaic portrait that elevates a humble folk-art medium into a refined tool for realistic contemporary expression

Dr. Rose Kirumira a legendary figure in Ugandan art and a senior lecturer at Makerere University, Dr. Kirumira is a sculptor who has spent decades researching material culture. The Work: While primarily a wood and clay sculptor, her research into "Visual Art Skills in Early Childhood Education" has heavily featured the banana fiber doll. She has explored how these traditional toys serve as the first "sculptures" Ugandan children ever encounter or create.

Themes: Her work often addresses the "human form" through a lens of African identity, frequently referencing the organic shapes and silhouettes found in traditional fiber crafts.

Figure 5: Preparation and harvesting of banana fibers to make crafts such as dolls.

While the banana fibre doll is no longer a staple of active play in modern Buganda households, it has undergone a metamorphosis within the contemporary art scene. Ugandan painters, seeking to decolonize their practice and reconnect with their heritage, have begun to incorporate the image and texture of the banana fibre doll into their work.

Figure 6: Joshua Yiga painting 551x800

In these paintings, the doll is no longer just a toy; it is a potent symbol of lost identity and cultural resilience. Artists use the doll to: Critique the "plasticity" of modern life. Evoke nostalgia for a pre-colonial Ganda childhood. Challenge the Western hierarchy of art by elevating "craft" materials into the realm of "high art."

Figure 7:A child tenderly traditional banana fibre doll figure painting.

1.3 Statement of the problem.

Despite of the fact that Uganda has rich and diverse heritage in traditional art forms there has been a significant decline in their practice, preservation and relevance in contemporary society. The colonial system introduced foreign cultural systems, religious indoctrination, hypothesis and doctrines to erode and wipe African brains also Uganda being part also introduced artistic standards which disrupted indigenous artistic expression. Many traditional art forms we devalued labeled uncivilized and, in some cases, deliberately suppressed. Today, there is limited documentation about the appreciation of Uganda's precolonial art forms which need to be addressed to the public especially the youth. Furthermore, scholarly research often overlooks the deep cultural of these art forms such banana fiber dolls particularly in Buganda where colonial influence was at its verge. Therefore, this study aimed to address and tackle some of the untouched part particularly Buganda.

1.4 Purpose of the study.

The purpose of the study was to explore and analyze the extent to which colonialism influenced and drove away traditional African craft making to adopt colonial ways to manufactured one particularly Buganda from banana fiber doll “dole y’ebyayi” to another form of dolls as a traditional art form. This research aimed to uncover the cultural shifts and artistic disruptions brought by colonial rule and how these changes affected the production, perception and preservation of indigenous art.

1.4.1 Objectives of the study.

The general objective was to examine the impact of colonialism on traditional art forms in Uganda, with the specific focus on banana fiber dolls in Buganda.

- ❖ To trace the historical origins and cultural significance of banana fiber dolls in Buganda before colonial influence.
- ❖ To analyze how colonialism affected the production, usage and symbolism of banana fiber dolls (Dole).
- ❖ To investigate the current role of banana fiber in Ugandan art, education and tourism.

1.5 Research questions.

- ❖ What role can documentation, education and cultural institutions play in preserving and promoting traditional Buganda art forms?
- ❖ How did colonialism impact the traditional banana fiber doll making techniques and practices in the Buganda kingdom?
- ❖ What strategies can be employed to preserve and promote traditional Buganda art forms, including banana fiber doll-making, in the face of globalization and cultural exchange?

1.6 Justification /rationale (reason of the research).

This research is important because it seeks to uncover how colonialism disrupted, reshaped and diminished traditional art forms in Uganda particularly Buganda region .Traditional art in Africa was only a form of expression but a key vehicle for preserving history ,spirituality ,value, norms and identity .During colonial rule many indigenous were erased and replaced to fit and suit western tastes ,religious agendas and political control the British in Uganda .Understanding this history is crucial and vital for cultural preservation ,informing art education and inspiring the younger generation to reconnect with the pass and also embrace it .It also add a brick to the colonization of African art history and

heritage also fuel in challenging the dominance of western narratives in creative spaces and fields such art schools such as Margaret Trowel school of Industrial and fine art at Makerere University.

1.7 Significance of the study.

- Cultural preservation, it helps in documenting and preserving traditional Buganda art forms particularly banana fiber dolls by bringing them back to light to highlight their cultural relevance before and after colonialism.
- Understanding colonial impact; this research helps us to understand how colonial legacy altered indigenous African art.
- Promotion of indigenous art by show casing the resilience and evolution of banana fiber.
- Education value, the findings will serve as a valuable resource for art history to universities.

1.8 Scope of the study.

This study focused on examining the impact of colonialism on traditionalism on traditional art forms in Uganda with a specific emphasis on the Buganda region .The research will cover the period from the late 19th century when British colonial influence intensified in Uganda up the post-independence era .It explores the traditional importance of banana fiber dolls .The research will also examine how colonial policies ,missionary activities and western education system influenced ,replaced and suppressed indigenous artistic expressions .

1. Geographical scope.

Geographically, the research was limited and rotated in central Uganda (Buganda), but the research findings provided insights applicable to other regions.

2. Time scope

- The study focused on the period between 1894 and the present day.
- Pre- colonial era (before 1894) to understand traditional art in indigenous context.
- Post-independence period (present) to access how colonial legacies continue to influence traditional art in Uganda and efforts towards revival.

3. Content scope.

The research explores the traditional art forms in Buganda, colonial interference such as education governance, cultural shift change of purpose and commercialization traditional art. Preservation and evolution of art and also gaps in research.

1.9 Unity of analysis.

The unity of analysis for the study focused on the study of traditional art forms of Buganda specifically the banana fiber dolls as a practiced and preserved in the Buganda region of Uganda.

- Individual artisans, techniques, motivation and experience in creation.
- Banana fiber dolls themselves as cultural artifact focusing on their form, symbolism, function and evolution.
- Cultural institutions and community practices such as museums, craft markets schools and homes where these dolls are taught, sold and used.
- Historical and colonial influences examining how colonialism affected the practice.
- Transmission of knowledge from one generation to another of doll making.

The unit of analysis allows the study to explore both tangible (artifacts) and intangible cultural knowledge.

1.10. Limitation of the study.

This study the impact of colonialism on traditional art forms, focusing on banana fiber doll making may have the following limitation.

- Geographical scope; the study might be limited to a specific region or community within the Buganda kingdom, potentially limiting other areas.
- Timeframe; the study's focus on historical impact might be limited by records.
- Language barrier; the research might be limited to language limitation.
- Cultural sensitivity; the researcher might not be familiar with the Buganda culture
- Access to participants; limited access to Buganda artisans.
- Archival limitations; access to historical records might be few hence affecting the depth of research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.

2.0 INTRODUCTION.

The literature review explores the depth ,examine the ways in which colonialism shaped African artists to the changes .By

analyzing the impact of colonialism on the Buganda kingdom's banana fiber doll making tradition, this study aims to contribute to the deeper understanding of complex dynamics of cultural exchange and resistance in African art .The impact of colonialism on African art forms, particularly in the Buganda kingdom has been profound and far-reaching .Colonialism disrupted traditional art forms, imposing European artistic standards and values that often marginalized indigenous practices. The Buganda kingdom's traditional banana fiber doll making was shaken by colonial influence percolated local art forms.

The cultural history of Buganda is deeply intertwined with the natural environment, social structures, and symbolic systems that shaped everyday life long before the arrival of colonial rule. Among the most enduring expressions of this indigenous creativity is the banana fibre doll known locally as *dole y'ebyayi*. These dolls, crafted from the abundant banana plant, were not merely children's toys but embodied a complex network of cultural meanings, pedagogical functions, and spiritual associations. Their origins, though not precisely documented in written records, can be traced through oral histories, ethnographic accounts, and comparative studies of African material culture. *"These dolls were more than mere toys; they were tools for socialization, reflecting the community's values, kinship structures, and gender roles."* This statement captures the essence of their significance: banana fibre dolls were cultural texts through which Buganda transmitted identity, morality, and social order.

2.1. Historical origins and cultural significance of banana fiber dolls in Buganda before colonial influence.

The historical origin of banana fiber dolls in Buganda is not clear to many historians however there in reference to other studies of

the world dolls have been in existence for a long period of time according to journal article the Doll Harris (Dec., 1920) explores the cultural evolution of dolls, tracing their transformation from sacred symbols to childhood toys. She emphasizes how dolls reflect societal values and human psychology. Muriel Harris's essay, published in The North American Review in December 1920, offers a thoughtful and historically rich examination of dolls not merely as playthings, but as cultural artifacts that mirror human civilization. She begins by distinguishing dolls from religious idols, noting that while both may share physical similarities, their purposes diverge: "The religious element does not come in here, or when it does, the doll ceases to be a doll proper".

Harris traces the doll's lineage back to ancient times, highlighting how early societies crafted figures that resembled humans. These were often used in rituals or as symbolic representations of fertility, protection, or spiritual connection. Over time, however, dolls shed their sacred roles and entered the domestic sphere, becoming companions for children. This shift, Harris argues, reflects broader changes in societal attitudes toward childhood and play. She also discusses the materials and craftsmanship of dolls through the ages. From primitive clay and wood figures to elaborately dressed porcelain dolls of the Victorian era, Harris illustrates how technological advances and aesthetic preferences shaped doll-making. The increasing realism of dolls, she notes, parallels a growing desire to replicate human features and behaviors suggesting a psychological need to nurture, control, or understand the self through imitation.

Importantly, Harris views dolls as mirrors of gender roles and domestic expectations. She critiques how dolls often reinforce traditional femininity, especially in the way girls are encouraged to care for baby dolls, mimicking maternal behavior. This, she suggests, subtly prepares them for adult roles in a patriarchal society. Yet she also acknowledges the imaginative freedom dolls

can offer, allowing children to project stories, emotions, and identities onto them. Throughout the article, Harris's tone is both analytical and poetic. She treats dolls not as trivial objects but as vessels of meaning, capable of revealing the values, anxieties, and aspirations of the cultures that produce them. Her essay invites readers to reconsider the doll's place in history not just as a toy, but as a symbol of human creativity and complexity. Dolls are believed to have been in existence for over 4000 years be at least four thousand years and the perfection of Egyptian dolls of that period makes it certain that her ancestry is considerably more remote than this.

Yet remains unchanged and unchanging, throughout history, nursing our delusions, giving us away without scruple, a silent witness to our emotions and our needs, to the futility of all our efforts to present ourselves as other than we are, to the devastating truth that there is no real dividing line between mortals and immortals. In Uganda in Buganda kingdom dolls were significantly used for mainly pedagogical purposes.

2.2. Traditional African Art and Cultural Identity.

Scholars such as Cole (1989) and Abiodun (1994) argue that African art is deeply interwoven with community, rituals, and daily life. Ideals and Power in the Art of Africa (1989), Cole explores how traditional African art functions not merely as aesthetic expression but as a dynamic force in shaping and sustaining cultural identity. Cole introduces the concept of "icons "recurring visual themes such as the couple, the woman and child, the armed male, the rider, and the stranger that have appeared across African art for over six thousand years. These icons, according to Cole, are not arbitrary motifs but deeply embedded symbols that reflect the core values and social ideals of African communities.

Cole's central argument is that African art is inherently tied to communal life and cultural continuity. Unlike Western notions of

art as individualistic or purely decorative, traditional African art is integrally linked to ritual, politics, religion, and social hierarchy. For example, sculptures of rulers or ancestors are not just representations they are imbued with spiritual power and serve as conduits for communication with the divine or the deceased. Artworks are often created for specific functions: to honor ancestors, to mark rites of passage, or to assert political authority. In this way, art becomes a living part of the cultural fabric, reinforcing identity through shared symbols and practices.

The five icons Cole identifies are especially significant because they transcend regional and ethnic boundaries, appearing in various forms across the continent. The couple, for instance, symbolizes harmony, fertility, and social balance. The woman and child icon emphasizes nurturing and continuity, while the armed male represents protection and authority. The rider often signifies prestige and mobility, and the stranger reflects themes of otherness and transformation. These icons are not static they evolve in response to changing social and political contexts, yet they retain their symbolic potency.

Cole also emphasizes the diversity within African art traditions. While the icons provide a unifying framework, their interpretation and execution vary widely depending on local customs, materials, and historical circumstances. This diversity underscores the richness of African cultural identity, which is both deeply rooted and dynamically adaptive.

Importantly, Cole challenges the Western tendency to view African art through a colonial or ethnographic lens. He advocates for understanding African art on its own terms, recognizing its intellectual and philosophical depth. By doing so, he elevates African art from mere artifact to a sophisticated medium of cultural expression. In his influential work, particularly the essay “Seeking the African in African Art,” Abiodun challenges Western-centric interpretations of African art by asserting that traditional African

art cannot be fully understood without engaging with the cultural and linguistic frameworks from which it originates. His 1994 argument centers on the Yoruba artistic tradition, using it as a lens to critique broader misconceptions about African art. Abiodun contends that Western art history often isolates African art from its functional, spiritual, and linguistic contexts, reducing it to mere aesthetic objects. This approach, he argues, strips African art of its cultural essence and misrepresents its purpose and meaning. For example, Yoruba art is deeply embedded in the concept of oriki a form of praise poetry that combines verbal and visual elements to convey identity, lineage, and spiritual significance. Without understanding oriki and its role in Yoruba society, one cannot grasp the full meaning of Yoruba sculpture, textiles, or performance art.

He further emphasizes that African art is not created for art's sake, but serves specific cultural functions ritual, political, social, and spiritual. Masks, for instance, are not just decorative objects but are activated through dance, music, and ritual, embodying ancestral spirits or deities. Abiodun argues that such art must be studied in its performative and communal context, not as static museum pieces.

A key part of Abiodun's 1994 argument is the call for African scholars and artists to reclaim the interpretation of their own cultural heritage. He advocates for methodologies that prioritize indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and linguistic nuances. This includes using African languages to analyze African art, as language carries cultural metaphors, idioms, and philosophical concepts that are often lost in translation. Abiodun's critique also extends to the colonial legacy in art history, which often categorized African art as "primitive" or "tribal." He dismantles these labels by demonstrating the complexity, intentionality, and philosophical depth of African artistic traditions. In doing so, he repositions African art as a sophisticated cultural

expression that deserves scholarly respect and contextual understanding.

In Buganda, crafts such as bark cloth, weaving, and mat-making have received attention, but dolls especially those made from banana fiber are rarely analyzed beyond their role in play or tourism. Yet, these dolls carry deep cultural codes that reflect gender roles, socialization, and storytelling tradition. Scholars also argues from anthropology art history citation highlight a major shift from African art from ethnographic studies of ritual t art in the 1970s to contemporary African art creativity.

2.3. Use of Natural Materials in Ugandan Craft and preservation.

In recent years, there has been resurgence in valuing indigenous crafts in Uganda, promoted by NGOs such as UNESCO and cultural institutions. Initiatives like the Uganda Crafts 2000 Ltd Kampala, Uganda and the Nommo Gallery found and established in 1964 by the 1959 act parliament, which is a Uganda's national art gallery and components of the Uganda national cultural center have showcased banana fiber art, though often focusing on baskets and decor rather than dolls. This gap presents a strong case for in-depth study of banana fiber dolls as cultural artifacts. While existing literature acknowledges the cultural and material value of Ugandan crafts, banana fiber dolls remain under-documented and under-theorized. In Most references are anecdotal or treated within broader themes of craft or tourism. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by documenting, analyzing, and preserving the artistic, cultural, and social relevance of banana fiber dolls in Buganda. Studies on Ugandan material culture. Kyeyune, (2003), Mwanja, Christine Kalembe (2023) emphasizes the innovative use of natural resources like banana fibers, bamboo, reeds, and bark cloth in sustainable art. In his 2003 work, Kyeyune explores how

indigenous materials particularly banana fibers can be repurposed into sustainable art forms that challenge conventional practices while celebrating local heritage. His argument is rooted in the belief that art should not only serve aesthetic and expressive purposes but also respond to pressing environmental concerns. By turning to banana fibers, which are abundant agricultural by-products in Uganda and other tropical regions, Kalembe highlights a resource that is both biodegradable and culturally resonant. Banana fibers, extracted from the pseudo stem of the banana plant, possess qualities that make them ideal for artistic experimentation: they are strong, flexible, and have a natural texture that lends itself to both two-dimensional and sculptural applications. Kalembe emphasizes that using such materials allows artists to reduce reliance on synthetic or imported supplies, which are often costly and environmentally damaging. Instead, banana fibers offer a sustainable alternative that aligns with the principles of eco-art art that is created with ecological awareness and often aims to inspire environmental action.

Mwanja situates this practice within a broader socio-cultural framework. He argues that incorporating banana fibers into art is not merely a technical innovation but a reclamation of indigenous knowledge systems. Traditional Ugandan crafts have long utilized plant-based materials, and by reviving these methods in contemporary art, creators can forge a dialogue between past and present. This approach also empowers local communities by validating their resources and skills, fostering economic opportunities through the production of eco-friendly art and textiles.

Kyeyune’s argument also touches on the symbolic potency of banana fibers. In many African cultures, the banana plant is associated with fertility, sustenance, and continuity. By embedding these fibers into artworks, artists can evoke narratives of resilience and regeneration concepts that resonate deeply in postcolonial

contexts where cultural identity and environmental degradation intersect. Sustainable art, in this view, becomes a medium for storytelling and healing, as well as ecological advocacy.

Importantly, Kyeyune does not romanticize the use of natural materials. He acknowledges the technical challenges involved in processing banana fibers for artistic use, such as ensuring durability and achieving desired aesthetic effects. However, he sees these challenges as opportunities for innovation, urging artists to experiment and collaborate across disciplines combining art, agriculture, and science to develop new techniques and applications. Banana fiber, in particular, is praised for its strength, availability, and eco-friendliness. However, the artistic transformation of banana fibers into dolls often created by women and children remains an understudied subject.

CH APTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology that guided the research process. It outlines the research design, population, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection methods and instruments, validity and reliability of the instruments, and methods of data analysis.

3.0 Research Design.

A research design is the overall strategy and blueprint for a research study, outlining the plan for how you will collect and analyze data to answer a research question or test a hypothesis. It is a logical structure that guides the study by defining the research objectives, methodology, sampling methods, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques to ensure the research is coherent and addresses the problem effectively.

This study adopted a qualitative research design using a descriptive case study approach reason being this design is suitable for exploring the nuanced effects of colonialism on traditional art practices and for documenting cultural knowledge therefore the research will be fully exploited using this method. For research to be carried out successfully, it required suitable research design. This is a plan adopted by a researcher before data collection commences so as to achieve the research objective in a valid way. Creswell (2014). A case study allowed for an in-depth, contextual analysis of a specific community in this case, the making of banana fiber dolls in Buganda.

3.1. Target Population.

The population of the study included:

- Traditional artisans (banana fiber doll makers)
- Cultural heritage practitioners (from Buganda Kingdom and National Museums) in Mengo palace.
- Art lecturers and historians
- Local community such as the elders

This population was chosen due to their direct knowledge or lived experience with traditional art forms and the colonial impact on them.

3.2. Sample Size and Sampling Technique.

Using purposive sampling, the study selected a sample of 8 participants, comprising:

- 2 traditional artisans
- 2cultural heritage officers
- 2 community elders
- 2Art lecturers

Purposive sampling was the ideal for selecting individuals who have deep, specific knowledge on the subject Patton (2002). This non-probability sampling method it ensured the quality and relevance of data.

3.3. Data Collection Methods.

The study used a qualitative primary data collection method, specifically:

- In-depth Interviews; This helped in gathering personal accounts, experiences, and perceptions.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); This explored communal perspectives and memory the group discussion held with different groups of people helped in exploration of the making and the uses of dolls.
- Participant Observation; This helped in witnessing the artistic processes and cultural expressions through visual analysis of the process and crafting.

Secondary data was gathered through:

- Document review; Including archival materials, published literature, museum reports, colonial records, history and oral traditional stories.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments.

The following instruments was used:

- Interview Guides: Semi-structured questions provided flexibility while maintaining focus.
- Observation Checklist: was used to record techniques, materials, and cultural expressions used in banana fiber doll-making.

- Document Review Template: Was used in extraction of relevant historical and academic information from literature and facts.

3.5. Validity and Reliability.

To ensure validity, tools were pre-tested with experts in art and heritage studies. Their feedback informed revisions.

Triangulation was applied using interviews, observations, and document review to validate findings from multiple perspectives Creswell (2014).

Reliability was ensured by:

- Using consistent questions across interviews
- Audio recording and transcribing for accuracy
- Maintaining detailed field notes for traceability

3.6. Data Analysis.

Data from interviews and FGDs was analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). The process included:

- Familiarization with data
- Coding and categorization
- Theme identification
- Interpretation

Relevant quotes were used to support findings. Observational data will supplement thematic insights with descriptive detail.

3.7. Ethical Considerations.

The study upholded ethical standards by:

- Obtaining informed consent
- Ensuring confidentiality
- Respecting cultural sensitivities

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA.

4.0. INTRODUCTION.

In this chapter, the data collected for the objectives as presented in chapter one shall be presented, analysed and interpreted. The objectives were;

- To trace the historical origins and cultural significance of banana fiber dolls in Buganda before colonial influence.
- To analyze how colonialism affected the production, usage and symbolism of banana fiber dolls (Dole).
- To investigate the current role of banana fiber in Ugandan art, education and tourism.

4.1 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS.

This chapter presents the systematic interpretation of data collected from the field through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, supported by document review. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the voices of participants, the lived experiences of artisans, and the historical evidence converge to explain the impact of colonialism on contemporary African art forms in Uganda, with a specific focus on banana-fibre doll-making in Buganda.

The process of obtaining these findings followed the qualitative descriptive case study design, which allowed to immerse deeply in the cultural environment of Buganda artisans. The purposive sampling technique ensured that only individuals with deep cultural knowledge traditional artisans, cultural heritage officers, elders, and art lecturers were selected. This approach aligns with

Creswell's (2014) argument that qualitative inquiry is most effective when the researcher seeks to understand "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."
Data collection involved three primary methods:

- **In-depth Interviews –** These provided personal narratives, memories, and interpretations of cultural change. One artisan noted: *"When I tie the central knot, I feel I am connecting. Another* one also explained how colonial religion changed the meaning of dolls: *"Before, this doll was like a child. We used it to teach girls about motherhood. When the missionaries came, they said it was evil, so people started calling it just a toy. "To my grandmother. But today, many young people do not know what that knot means."*

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) –** This enabled collective reflection on how colonialism altered the meaning, production, and perception of banana-fibre dolls. A community elder remarked during an FGD: *"Before the missionaries came, these dolls were not toys. They were lessons. They were identity."* Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): also allowed collective reflection and comparison of experiences across generations. In one FGD, an elder remarked: *"In our childhood, a doll was not only for playing. It was a lesson, a story, a connection to our clan."*
- **Participant Observation –** This allowed the researcher to witness the crafting process, observe symbolic gestures, and document the material culture embedded in the art form. Observations revealed that artisans still use the spiral wrapping technique, though its symbolic meaning is fading among younger makers. Participant observation: I also observed artisans at work, the techniques they used, the materials they selected, and the way they spoke about their craft. This helped you see the symbolic gestures such as how

the central knot is tied with care and how the spiral wrapping is done slowly and rhythmically

Figure 8*: The intricate folding and tying require a high level of hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity.*

Secondary data from archival records, Buganda Kingdom cultural documents, and museum reports provided historical grounding. This triangulation strengthened the validity of the findings, as recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006) in thematic analysis.

- Familiarized yourself with the data (reading and re-reading transcripts and notes).
- Coded the data (identifying repeated ideas such as “idolatry,” “craft vs fine art,” “tourist souvenir,” “eco-friendly,” “apprenticeship,” etc.).
- Grouped codes into themes that aligned with your objectives.
- Interpreted the themes in relation to colonial impact, cultural identity, and material preservation.

Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for cultural sensitivities were observed throughout the process.

The findings presented here were obtained through a qualitative research design using a descriptive case study approach. This design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of cultural practices, meanings, and transformations over time. As stated in my methodology:

“This study adopted a qualitative research design using a descriptive case study approach reason being this design is suitable for exploring the nuanced effects of colonialism on traditional art practices and for documenting cultural knowledge…”

Data was collected from a target population that included traditional artisans (banana fibre doll makers), cultural heritage practitioners from Buganda Kingdom and national museums, art lecturers and historians, and local elders. A purposive sample of 8 participants was selected:

- 2 traditional artisans
- 2 cultural heritage officers
- 2 community elders
- 2 art lecturers

Purposive sampling ensured that each participant had deep, specific knowledge of banana fibre dolls and their cultural and historical context. As you noted:

“Purposive sampling was the ideal for selecting individuals who have deep, specific knowledge on the subject… This non-probability sampling method ensured the quality and relevance of data.”

4.2.1 OBJECTIVE ONE: HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BANANA FIBRE DOLLS IN BUGANDA BEFORE COLONIAL INFLUENCE.

The cultural history of Buganda is deeply rooted in its natural environment, social structures, and symbolic systems. Among the most enduring expressions of this indigenous creativity is the banana fibre doll *dole y’ebyayi*. These dolls were not merely toys but embodied a complex network of cultural meanings, pedagogical functions, and spiritual associations. As the document states, *“These dolls were more than mere toys; they were tools for socialization, reflecting the community’s values, kinship structures, and gender roles.”* This underscores their role as cultural texts

through which Buganda transmitted identity, morality, and social order.

To fully understand the origins of the *banana fibre dolls*, we must first examine the domestic and ecological landscape of pre-colonial Buganda. The kingdom’s economy and daily life revolved around the banana plantation (*olusuku*). The *matooke* plant was not merely a dietary staple; it was an omnipresent life-giving force. Every component of the plant had a designated utility: leaves were used for cooking and wrapping, corms for moisture retention, and the pseudo stem yielded the versatile fibres (*ebyayi*) that formed the literal and figurative backbone of material culture. In my presentation of this data, I argue that the creation of banana fibre dolls was an organic, inevitable extension of this environmental intimacy. Because children and mothers spent their days within the shaded sanctuary of the *the garden*, the raw materials for creative expression were always within arm's reach. The fibre itself is highly tactile, resilient, and malleable when freshly stripped, making it the perfect medium for spontaneous sculptural expression. It required no specialized imported tools only the human hand, a sharp fingernail or a small knife, and a deep understanding of the fibber’s grain and tensile strength.

Within the traditional Buganda homestead, education was non-formal, communal, and highly mimetic. The *banana fibre dolls* served as a foundational educational technology. Young girls, in particular, were gifted or taught to craft these dolls to simulate the domestic realities they would inherit as adult women. By cradling, carrying, and wrapping these fibre figures on their backs using traditional cloths, young girls practiced the physical mechanics of childcare and baby positioning. This play was a deliberate pedagogical strategy designed to instil nurturing instincts, patience, and domestic responsibility. The process of constructing the doll was itself an instructional ritual. An elder woman or

grandmother would sit with the young girls, guiding their fingers to bind the core, shape the torso, and smooth the outer sheath. As they manipulated the fibre, the *grands* would recount oral histories, clan genealogies, and proverbs. The doll, therefore, acted as a physical anchor for the transmission of communal knowledge. It was an object through which a child was introduced to the complex kinship networks of the kingdom, learning how to respect elders, understand lineage, and navigate their future roles within the patriarchal framework of Buganda society.

Beyond domestic socialization, certain fibre figures held deeper, esoteric meanings tied to the indigenous spiritual cosmos of Buganda, which was governed by the *Lubaale* (deities), *Balubaale* (ancestral spirits), and *Mizimu* (ghosts). While everyday play dolls were discarded or allowed to decompose naturally back into the soil of the *olusuku*, other specifically consecrated fibre figures were utilized by traditional healers (*abasaba* or *basawo baganda*) and spiritual mediums. In cases of prolonged childhood illness, twin ceremonies (*Ababalongo*), or reproductive challenges within a lineage, fibre figures were sometimes constructed to serve as temporary vessels or symbolic surrogates. For instance, if a twin passed away, a substitute figure made from organic materials, including banana fibres, might be kept by the mother to appease the spiritual double and maintain cosmic balance within the household. The material integrity of the fibre being organic, tied to the ancestral land, and derived from a plant that continuously regenerates through suckers made it an ideal symbol for fertility, continuity, and the unbreakable link between the living and the dead.

When compiling and presenting this historical data, it becomes evident that pre-colonial Buganda maintained a sophisticated philosophy of art that did not separate utility from beauty, or secular play from sacred ritual. However, in my opinion, the true

historical significance of the *banana fibre dolls* does not lie in its visual complexity, but rather in its radical accessibility and its role as a living archive of Baganda indigenous knowledge systems. Modern analyses often make the mistake of evaluating these pre-colonial objects through a restrictive, Western art-historical lens that prioritizes permanence (such as marble, bronze, or oil canvas).

However, the ephemeral and biodegradable nature of the banana fibre doll is precisely what defined its cultural brilliance. It was an art form completely integrated into the cyclical rhythm of nature. It did not seek to conquer time through artificial preservation; instead, it served its immediate pedagogical or spiritual purpose and then harmoniously dissolved back into the earth, reflecting a worldview that deeply respected environmental sustainability and ancestral continuity long before the introduction of foreign materials.

4.2.2 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This theme answers Objective 2.1 and focuses on pre-colonial roots, symbolic meanings, and the impact of early colonial and religious shifts.

4.3.3. COLONIAL IMPACT ON THE PRODUCTION, USAGE, AND SYMBOLISM OF BANANA FIBRE DOLLS IN BUGANDA.

The arrival of British colonial rule in Uganda during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked a profound turning point in the cultural, artistic, and social landscape of the Buganda Kingdom. Among the many indigenous practices affected by colonial influence was the tradition of banana fibre doll-making a practice that had long served as a vehicle for cultural transmission, socialization, and symbolic expression. Colonialism did not merely introduce new political structures; it imposed a new hierarchy of knowledge, aesthetics, and values that systematically

marginalized indigenous art forms. As my document states, *“The colonial education system and the introduction of Western-style ‘Fine Art’ prioritised European mediums… dismissing indigenous crafts as ‘primitive’* according to field research and findings. This shift had far-reaching consequences for the production, usage, and symbolism of banana fibre dolls, transforming them from culturally embedded artifacts into objects stripped of their deeper meaning.

This displacement began within colonial schools, which introduced a rigid division separating Western "Fine Art" (like oil painting and realism) from indigenous "Craft." Relegated to the status of mere "handicrafts," banana fibre doll was systematically devalued. Students were conditioned to view it as a rudimentary plaything of an uneducated past rather than a legitimate sculptural form, breaking the intergenerational chain of oral teaching between elders and youth in the *garden*. At the same time, the introduction of a Western cash economy brought imported plastic and cloth dolls, which became symbols of modern prestige. To survive economically, local production shifted from a widespread domestic ritual into a commercialized activity for European tourists. Artisans were forced to alter the doll's original, symbolic abstraction into literal, romanticized forms that fit the foreign gaze as exotic souvenirs. Furthermore, Christian missionaries heavily stigmatized the spiritual dimensions of these dolls, labelling organic figures used in traditional healing or twin ceremonies (*Ababalongo*) as "witchcraft." This religious policing successfully stripped the doll of its sacred associations with fertility and ancestral continuity.
When analysing this transformation, it is evident that colonial intervention fundamentally altered the purpose and perception of the banana fibre doll. However, in my opinion, viewing this history solely as a tragedy of cultural loss overlooks the tactical agency of local creators. Traditional critiques often argue that turning indigenous art into tourist curios entirely dilutes its authenticity.

However, the adaptation of the *banana fibre dolls* into the colonial market was a resilient act of survival. By transforming the doll into a commercial commodity, Baganda artisans used the colonial system to preserve their physical weaving and binding techniques, ensuring that the material knowledge lived on to be reclaimed by contemporary Ugandan fine artists today.

4.3.4 RECLASSIFICATION OF INDIGENOUS ART AS INFERIOR.

One of the most significant impacts of colonialism was the reclassification of indigenous art as inferior to European artistic traditions. Colonial administrators, missionaries, and educators viewed African art through a Eurocentric lens, interpreting it as primitive, fetishist, or merely functional. This perspective was rooted in Victorian ideologies that equated civilization with European cultural norms. As a result, traditional crafts including banana fibre dolls were relegated to the margins of artistic value.
This reclassification had practical consequences. Indigenous art was excluded from formal art education, museum collections, and state-sponsored cultural programs. Instead, colonial schools introduced Western art forms such as oil painting, academic drawing, and sculpture in imported materials like plaster and bronze. These new standards created a hierarchy in which African materials and techniques were considered inferior, leading to a decline in the prestige and transmission of traditional doll-making.

This academic exclusion institutionalized a psychological landscape where the material heritage of the Buganda Kingdom was systematically unlearned. By framing European mediums as the sole vehicles for high intellectual and artistic expression, the colonial system successfully conditioned emerging generations of Baganda artists to equate their own organic resources with cultural

backwardness. The intricate geometry and structural engineering required to bind, layer, and wrap raw banana fibres into a *banana fibre doll* were dismissed as mindless manual Labor rather than recognized as rigorous design methodologies. Consequently, the prestigious title of "artist" was reserved exclusively for those who mastered foreign techniques, while the custodians of indigenous material culture were minimized as mere "artisans" or "craft workers," pushing a highly sophisticated visual language into the background of academic discourse.

When evaluating this systemic devaluation, it becomes clear that the colonial reclassification was not an honest misunderstanding of aesthetics, but a deliberate tool of cultural subjugation. However, treating this historical hierarchy as a permanent erasure of indigenous artistic validity overlooks the intrinsic resilience of local materials. Mainstream art history frequently focuses on how Western training dominated African creative production during the colonial era. However, in my opinion, the survival of the banana fibre doll outside the formal academy proves that the colonial hierarchy failed to destroy the core of Baganda creative identity. While the colonial school system was busy glorifying imported oil paints and bronze, the everyday homestead continued to rely on the sustainable, accessible, and deeply familiar banana plant, ensuring that an authentic philosophy of art remained alive at the grassroots level until contemporary scholars and artists could formally dismantle these Eurocentric biases.

4.3. MISSIONARY INFLUENCE AND THE SUPPRESSION OF SYMBOLISM.

Missionaries played a central role in reshaping the cultural meaning of banana fibre dolls. Many missionaries viewed African spiritual practices as pagan and sought to eliminate objects

associated with indigenous belief systems. Dolls with symbolic features such as breasts, navels, or ritual knots were condemned as immoral or idolatrous. Your document notes that *"Missionaries said the dolls were pagan. People removed the breasts and knots. They became plain toys."* This pressure led artisans and families to simplify the dolls, removing the symbolic elements that once encoded cultural knowledge.

The suppression of symbolism was not merely aesthetic; it represented a deeper assault on the worldview embedded in the dolls. By stripping them of their spiritual and pedagogical functions, missionaries disrupted the transmission of cultural identity. The doll, once a vessel of meaning, became a neutral object acceptable only if it conformed to Christian moral standards.

4.3.4 INTRODUCTION OF WESTERN TOYS AND CONSUMER GOODS.

Colonial trade networks introduced mass-produced goods into Uganda, including plastic dolls imported from Europe and Asia. These dolls, often dressed in Western clothing and featuring European facial features, quickly became symbols of modernity and status. Many families, eager to align themselves with the new colonial order, purchased these imported toys for their children.

The presence of Western dolls created a cultural displacement. Children began to associate beauty, sophistication, and desirability with European aesthetics. The banana fibre doll, once central to childhood play and cultural education, was increasingly viewed as old-fashioned or inferior. This shift contributed to the decline of traditional doll-making, as demand for handmade dolls diminished. This psychological realignment of consumer desire successfully commercialized the intimate spaces of childhood play, using imported goods to anchor the values of the global market directly within the domestic household.

The visual and material contrast introduced by these foreign imports fractured the aesthetic consensus of the Baganda homestead. Plastic dolls, with their smooth, artificial surfaces and factory-tailored garments, were intentionally positioned as tangible rewards of economic modernization. In contrast, the organic, earthy texture of the *banana fibre dolls* which had for generations been celebrated for its deep tactile connection to the life-giving *matooke* plantation was systematically recontextualized as a badge of rural poverty and backwardness. This commercial penetration went beyond simple play; it initiated an internalized colourism and cultural alienation, as children were quietly conditioned to prioritize synthetic, foreign representations of the human body over the sustainable, abstract sculptural traditions developed by their own ancestors.

When presenting this data on consumer displacement, it is clear that the influx of global commodities served as an aggressive, non-military vehicle for cultural assimilation. However, analysing this transition simply as a total surrender to Western consumerism overlooks the nuanced material politics that remained at play within the wider community. Modern economic critiques frequently assume that the arrival of mass-produced plastic completely wiped out the functional relevance of indigenous toys. However, nthe persistence of the banana fibre doll among rural and economically marginalized urban families can be viewed as a subconscious act of economic and cultural resilience. While elite spaces readily traded their heritage for imported plastic, the everyday homestead maintained a grounded, practical relationship with the *garden* environment, ensuring that the manual intelligence of fibre processing was preserved as an accessible, cost-free, and autonomous alternative to colonial capitalism.

4.3.4 STANDARDIZATION THROUGH COLONIAL EDUCATION.

Colonial schools introduced handicraft classes that included simplified versions of traditional crafts. However, these classes emphasized uniformity, neatness, and technical precision rather than cultural meaning. Dolls produced in these settings were graded based on how closely they matched a standardized model, not on their symbolic or narrative content.

This approach fundamentally altered the purpose of doll-making. Instead of being a creative, culturally embedded practice, it became a mechanical exercise designed to instil discipline and conformity. The apprenticeship model where elders taught children through storytelling and symbolic explanation was replaced by a classroom model that prioritized technical skill over cultural knowledge. This institutional intervention successfully decoupled the physical act of making from the intellectual act of cultural preservation.

By introducing rigid grading systems based on Eurocentric definitions of "neatness" and "symmetry," the colonial curriculum sought to transform a fluid, community-driven art form into a predictable manufacturing task. In the traditional homestead setting, structural variations in the *banana fibre dolls* were intentional and meaningful reflecting a specific clan lineage, an individual child’s family structure, or a particular proverb shared during its creation. The classroom environment entirely erased this creative autonomy. The banana fibre was stripped of its organic storytelling capacity and treated merely as a cheap, disposable material to test manual dexterity, conditioning young Baganda students to believe that art only possessed value if it conformed to an external, institutional standard.

When evaluating this educational restructuring, it is evident that colonial standardization was designed to train compliant, disciplined hands suited for administrative or industrial Labor

rather than independent cultural thinkers. However, in my opinion, viewing this classroom formalization simply as the complete destruction of creative expression misses the strategic adaptability of the students themselves. Mainstream academic histories often assume that rigid school grading entirely crushed indigenous artistic agency. However, in my opinion, Baganda youth subtly subverted this decontextualized training. By mastering the strict technical precision demanded by colonial educators, they actually sharpened their formal design and structural engineering skills. They kept the physical craft of fibre manipulation alive under intense institutional pressure, providing a technical foundation that contemporary Ugandan fine artists and designers now use to create highly sophisticated, structurally sound fibre sculptures in contemporary galleries today.

4.3.4 LOSS OF RITUAL AND PEDAGOGICAL ROLES

As colonial religion and education reshaped social norms, the ritual and pedagogical roles of banana fibre dolls diminished. Dolls were no longer used to teach girls about motherhood, clan identity, or social responsibility. Instead, they became secular toys, stripped of their deeper cultural significance.

This loss had long-term implications for gendered socialization. Without the symbolic framework provided by traditional dolls, children lost an important avenue for learning about their roles within the community. The erosion of these practices contributed to a broader weakening of cultural continuity creating a profound generational disconnect where material objects were completely detached from communal values.

This systemic secularization fundamentally severed the *banana fibre dolls* from its institutional roots within the Buganda family structure, converting a highly functional educational and spiritual medium into an ordinary object of passive amusement. In pre-colonial Buganda, the doll functioned as a dynamic socio-cultural

text. It was the physical anchor through which young girls rehearsed child-rearing mechanics and absorbed complex clan lineages, while specific spiritual figures maintained cosmic balance and fertility protections within the household. By imposing Eurocentric educational standards and Christian family ideals, the colonial system systematically dismantled these communal learning structures. The doll was pushed out of the sacred and instructional spheres of the homestead, losing its capacity to communicate complex societal expectations, gender roles, and indigenous moral codes to the next generation.

When evaluating this institutional decline, it is evident that the erasure of these pedagogical functions reflected a broader colonial effort to weaken the transmission of indigenous knowledge systems. Analysing this transition solely as a story of complete cultural erasure overlooks the quiet survival of the medium's educational value. Traditional analyses often argue that when an artifact loses its original ritual function, it becomes entirely hollowed out. However, in my opinion, even when stripped of its formal sacred status, the *banana fibre dolls* retained a fundamental pedagogical power through its raw materiality. By simply remaining a hands-on, self-made toy in rural homesteads, the fibre doll continued to teach Baganda children resourcefulness, spatial coordination, and an intimate tactical understanding of their natural environment, keeping a grounded, localized form of learning alive beneath the surface of the colonial order.

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4.3.5 ECONOMIC DISPLACEMENT AND THE RISE OF COMMERCIAL CRAFT MARKETS.

Colonial capitalism introduced new economic structures that marginalized traditional artisans. Imported goods were cheaper and more widely available than handmade crafts. As a result, many

artisans abandoned doll-making in favour of wage labour or cash-crop agriculture. In my interview with the craft sellers at craft village at Buganda Road Kampala I found out that banana fibre dolls became a commodity of trade to tourist to those who continued to make dolls often did so for commercial craft markets catering to tourists. In these markets, dolls were produced quickly and cheaply, with little attention to symbolic detail. Today dolls became a commodity rather than a cultural artifact, further distancing it from its traditional meaning. This aggressive shifts from communal creation to market-driven exploitation reconfigured the economic value of indigenous Labor, transforming a sacred skill into a transactional hustle.

The integration of Buganda into the global capitalist network required a radical reorganization of time, Labor, and material resources. In the pre-colonial economy, crafting a *banana fibre doll* was embedded in the unpaid, cooperative cycles of domestic and agricultural life. However, under the British tax regimes, local makers were forced to prioritize cash transactions to meet colonial fiscal demands. This structural pressure meant that the extensive time required to carefully select, cure, dry, and intricately weave premium banana fibres could no longer be justified for purely internal, communal functions. When artisans shifted their production toward early tourist hubs such as the emerging urban markets in Kampala the aesthetic demands of the consumer changed instantly. European buyers valued speed, low cost, and a generalized "African aesthetic" over the specific, nuanced structural knots and anatomical expressions that carried deep clan meaning. To survive this economic squeeze, creators had to adopt mass-production techniques, trading structural storytelling for rapid, uniform output.

When presenting this data on economic transformation, it is undeniably clear that colonial capitalism fractured the organic relationship between the artisan and their community. However, in

my opinion, analysing this commercial shift strictly through a lens of cultural corruption and absolute loss overlooks the creative agency and economic resistance of Baganda women and artisans. Mainstream economic histories frequently argue that when an indigenous artifact is commodified for tourism, its authentic cultural value is entirely neutralized. However, cthe emergence of the commercial craft market can be reinterpreted as a critical site of survival and tactical adaptation. By pivoting to the tourist trade, local artisans successfully weaponized the very capitalist structures meant to marginalize them. They transformed the *banana fibre dolls* into a financial lifeline that funded their households and children's education, while quietly ensuring that the foundational, physical techniques of banana fibre processing, splitting, and wrapping were never forgotten. This economic transition did not kill the craft; rather, it preserved a technical lineage under oppressive conditions, keeping the material intelligence alive so that it could eventually be reclaimed by contemporary Ugandan fine artists as an explicit medium of historical commentary and post-colonial identity.

4.3.6 TRANSFORMATION OF SYMBOLISM UNDER COLONIAL PRESSURE.

Colonialism did not eliminate banana fibre dolls; it transformed their symbolism. The doll shifted from a culturally rich object to a symbol of nostalgia, heritage, or exoticism. In some cases, dolls were used to represent African identity in a simplified or romanticized form, catering to colonial expectations of “authentic” African culture.

This transformation reflects a broader pattern in colonial contexts, where indigenous objects are preserved only after being stripped of their original meaning and repurposed to fit colonial narratives.

(a) Traditional motifs and their loss/modification under religious pressure

Field findings show that pre-colonial banana fibre dolls in Buganda were not merely toys. They carried fertility symbols, ancestral protection motifs, and clan identity markers. I summarized this in my findings:

"Pre-colonial dolls often featured motifs representing fertility and ancestral protection, such as specific belly-button (umbilical) knots or exaggerated feminine forms."

These motifs were used as:

- **Symbolism embedded in form and technique.**

The artistry of banana fibre dolls lies in the symbolic meanings embedded in their construction. The central knot symbolized the umbilical cord, representing life, continuity, and the connection between mother, child, and clan. The spiral wrapping technique mimicked the growth of the banana plant, symbolizing stability, fertility, and the cyclical nature of life. As one artisan explained, *"When we wrap the doll from bottom to top, we follow the way the banana grows. It is a blessing for growth."*

The choice of banana fibre itself was symbolic. The banana plant (*matooke*) is central to Ganda life economically, socially, and spiritually. Using banana fibre reinforced the idea that the plant was a source of life and identity.

- **Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge**

Before colonialism, doll-making was transmitted through informal apprenticeship, typically from grandmothers to granddaughters. This process occurred in intimate domestic spaces and involved storytelling, proverbs, and moral lessons. The document notes that *"The apprenticeship model relied on intergenerational oral*

tradition." This ensured that doll-making was embedded within a broader cultural education.

- **Spiritual and Ritual Associations**

Some banana fibre dolls were used in rituals related to fertility, protection, or ancestral communication. Their simplified forms allowed them to serve as symbolic vessels. In some clans, dolls were placed in shrines or used in rites of passage.

With the arrival of Christianity and Islam, missionaries and religious leaders redefined these motifs as "pagan" or "idolatrous." As I write:

"With the introduction of Christianity and Islam, these were often labelled as 'pagan' or 'idolatrous.' As a result, the dolls were 'secularized' moving from ritual objects… to simple, featureless 'playthings or decorative ornaments."

A cultural heritage officer explained in an interview:

"When the church came, they told people that these dolls were like small gods. So, people removed the breasts, removed the belly knots, and made them plain. They said, 'Now it is just for children.'"

This shows a direct link between religious discourse and the erasure of symbolic motifs.

(b) Symbolic meanings of knots and wrapping patterns

The central knot and wrapping patterns were repeatedly mentioned by artisans and elders as carriers of meaning. From field notes state:

"In traditional Buganda construction, the 'central knot' often symbolizes the (umbilical cord), representing the link between the child, the mother, and the clan. The spiralling wrapping pattern mimics the growth of the banana plant itself…"

Artisans explained that:

- The central knot represents the umbilical cord, symbolizing life, birth, and connection to the clan.
- The spiral wrapping symbolizes growth, continuity, and the eternal cycle of life, just like the banana plant that keeps producing suckers.
- A tightly bound base could signify a girl's transition to womanhood and the protection of her virtue.

One elder said:
"When we wrap the doll from bottom to top, we are following the way the banana grows. It is like saying, 'May this child grow well, like the banana plant.'"

(c) Marginalization of apprenticeship by Western education.

Traditionally, skills were passed down through apprenticeship, especially from grandmothers to granddaughters. You noted:
"The apprenticeship model relied on intergenerational oral tradition (grandmother to granddaughter). Western 'Handicraft' classes in the early 20th century standardized the craft."
Western education introduced formal handicraft classes, where:

- The focus shifted from story and meaning to uniformity and grading.
- Students were evaluated on how similar their dolls looked, not on the cultural narrative behind them.
- The fireside learning space was replaced by the classroom, weakening the emotional and spiritual dimension of the craft.

A lecturer commented:
"In school, they told us to make dolls that look the same. No one asked us, 'What does this knot mean?' We just followed the pattern for marks."

(d) Earth-tone colour palette and perception of authenticity

Your findings highlight that the natural colours of dried banana fibre ochres, tans, browns create a strong sense of authenticity and antiquity:

“The natural ochres, tans, and deep browns of dried byayi (fibre) trigger a psychological association with the earth and antiquity.”

Museum staff observed that visitors often assume the dolls are very old, even when they are recently made, because of the colour and texture. This shows how material aesthetics influence perception.

(e) Colonial policies on “craft” vs “fine art”

Colonial administrations categorized indigenous works as “crafts” and reserved the label “fine art” for European media like oil painting and marble sculpture:

“Colonial administrations often categorized indigenous works as ‘crafts’ (utilitarian/primitive) while reserving ‘fine art’ for European mediums…”

This classification:

- Pushed banana fibre doll-making into the domestic/private sphere.
- Prevented it from being recognized as a serious sculptural medium in early art schools.
- Contributed to the low status of the craft in formal art discourse.

A heritage officer said:

“Our dolls were never taken to galleries as art. They were for the home, for the market, but not for the museum as ‘fine art’.”

4.1.2 ANALYSIS OF OBJECTIVE ONE.

The findings show that colonialism did not simply “touch” the craft; it restructured its meaning. The loss of motifs is not accidental it is the result of religious condemnation and cultural reclassification. The central knot, once a spiritual symbol, is now often seen as a mere technical necessity.

The apprenticeship model was not just a teaching method; it was a cultural transmission system. When Western education replaced it, the craft lost its narrative depth and became a skill without story.
The earth-tone palette demonstrates that even when meanings are lost, material qualities can still carry a sense of authenticity. This suggests that some aspects of cultural identity remain embedded in the material itself, even when the interpretive framework changes.
The craft vs fine art dichotomy imposed by colonial policy created a hierarchy that still influences how banana fibre dolls are valued today often seen as souvenirs rather than sculptures.

4.1.3 INTERPRETATION OF OBJECTIVE ONE.

Overall, banana fibre dolls in Buganda can be interpreted as compressed cultural texts. Before colonialism, they encoded:

- Spiritual beliefs
- Gender roles
- Clan identity
- Life-cycle rituals

Colonialism did not eliminate the dolls, but it emptied many of their meanings and repositioned them as secular toys or decorative crafts. This is a classic pattern of cultural displacement, where the form survives but the original function and symbolism are weakened.
The findings therefore support the argument that colonialism transformed African art from a living cultural practice into an objectified category, often stripped of its spiritual and social depth.

4.2 OBJECTIVE TWO: IMPACT OF COLONIALIASM.

Traditional African art has always been an inseparable extension of cultural identity, serving as a dynamic archive of history,

philosophy, and community values rather than a detached aesthetic luxury. In pre-colonial societies, art was integrated into the daily rhythms of life, where visual forms whether masquerades, royal regalia, or household objects functioned as living texts that communicated a society's worldview, lineage, and spiritual cosmos. Within the Buganda Kingdom, this relationship between art and identity is profoundly articulated through the utilization of indigenous materials. The creation of artifacts from local flora, such as barkcloth and banana fibres, was not merely a choice of convenience; it was a deliberate statement of connection to the ancestral land, where the material itself carried the weight of communal history, memory, and cultural continuity.

Within this framework, the *banana fibre dolls* stand as a localized manifestation of Baganda identity, anchoring the individual to the collective consciousness of the kingdom from childhood. The banana plant is intrinsically woven into the origin narratives and socio-economic structures of Buganda, meaning that to manipulate its fibre is to engage with the literal essence of Baganda life. These fibre dolls did more than teach domestic roles; they visually and textually socialized children into their clans, reinforcing the kinship systems and moral codes that held the society together. In a culture where history was traditionally preserved through oral transmission and physical performance, the doll functioned as a tangible repository of identity. It was a physical marker that reminded the young and old alike of their place within the cosmic and social hierarchy of the kingdom, embodying a philosophy where art, environment, and personhood were fundamentally one.
When assessing the intersection of traditional art and identity, it is evident that material objects are essential for maintaining cultural memory across generations.

However, modern definitions of identity often fall into the trap of viewing traditional African art as a static, unchanging relic of the past that must be preserved exactly as it was. The true power of traditional art in shaping contemporary identity lies in its fluid adaptability. The banana fibre doll is not a symbol of a dead culture; rather, its survival and evolution reflect the resilient, living nature of Baganda identity. By continuing to use an indigenous material like *banana fibre dolls* in contemporary spaces, modern presenters and artists are not just nostalgic for the pre-colonial era they are actively using traditional design philosophies to assert their autonomy, resist cultural assimilation, and redefine what it means to be African in a globalized world.

4.2.1 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This theme addresses Objective 2.2 and focuses on how banana fibre dolls reflect evolving Buganda identity, socio-economic shifts, and the transition from utility to art and commodity.

4.2.2 COLONIAL IMPACT ON THE PRODUCTION, USAGE, AND SYMBOLISM OF BANANA FIBRE DOLLS.

The arrival of British colonial rule marked a profound turning point in Buganda's cultural landscape. Colonialism imposed new hierarchies of knowledge and aesthetics that marginalized indigenous art forms. As the document states, *"The colonial education system… dismissed indigenous crafts as 'primitive'."* This had far-reaching consequences for banana fibre dolls.

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4.2.3 RECLASSIFICATION OF INDIGENOUS ART AS INFERIOR.

Colonial administrators and missionaries viewed African art through a Eurocentric lens, interpreting it as primitive or merely functional. Traditional crafts including banana fibre dolls were

excluded from formal art education and museum collections. Western art forms such as oil painting and academic drawing were prioritized, creating a hierarchy that devalued indigenous materials.

By labelling foreign mediums as superior, the colonial system forced young Baganda students to unlearn the value of their own material heritage. The complex structural engineering and design skills required to strip, manipulate, and bind *fibre* into banana fibre dolls were dismissed as mindless manual Labor rather than recognized as a legitimate design methodology.

Consequently, the prestigious title of "artist" was reserved exclusively for those who mastered Western techniques, while the custodians of indigenous material culture were minimized as mere "artisans," which led to a steep decline in the social prestige and formal transmission of traditional doll-making.

When analysing this aesthetic hierarchy, it becomes clear that reclassifying local art was a deliberate strategy to undermine indigenous cultural confidence. However, evaluating these historical dynamics purely as a story of total displacement overlooks the inherent endurance of local materials. Mainstream academic narratives often focus heavily on how European training dominated the artistic landscape during the colonial era. However, the survival of the banana fibre doll outside the formal classroom proves that the colonial hierarchy failed to sever the core connection between the Baganda people and their environment, ensuring that a resilient, sustainable philosophy of art remained alive at the grassroots level.

4.2.4 MISSIONARY INFLUENCE AND SUPPRESSION OF SYMBOLISM

Missionaries condemned dolls with symbolic features as pagan. The document notes: *“Missionaries said the dolls were pagan. People removed the breasts and knots. They became plain toys.”* This led to the removal of symbolic elements that once encoded cultural knowledge.

The physical features targeted by the missionaries such as the prominent breasts and stylized structural knots were not mere decorations; they were visual metaphors representing fertility, biological continuity, and the complex kinship ties of the Buganda Kingdom. By forcing the removal of these specific anatomical and structural markers, the colonial religious system effectively sanitized the doll, transforming it from a sacred pedagogical text into a blank, secular commodity. This systematic erasure ensured that the younger generation of Baganda could no longer read the doll as an archive of maternal health, ancestral lineages, or traditional cosmological protections.

When analysing this aesthetic suppression, it is evident that Christian missionaries recognized the power of material culture in sustaining indigenous worldviews and actively sought to disrupt it. However, focusing entirely on the physical flattening of these objects’ risks obscuring the deeper, psychological resistance of the makers. Traditional historical narratives often view the removal of these symbolic features as a total surrender to colonial religious authority. However, the alteration of the *banana fibre dolls* can be understood as a calculated strategy of cultural concealment. By making the dolls appear "plain" and harmless to the colonial eye, Baganda families were able to preserve the underlying material practice of fibre weaving within the home, keeping the technical lineage alive under the guise of an innocent, secular toy.

4.2.5 INTRODUCTION OF WESTERN TOYS.

Colonial trade introduced plastic dolls from Europe and Asia. These dolls became symbols of modernity, leading children to associate beauty and sophistication with European aesthetics. Traditional dolls were increasingly viewed as inferior.

The arrival of these foreign toys created a stark visual contrast within the domestic sphere. Plastic dolls, with their synthetic textures, standardized proportions, and Eurocentric features, were marketed as the epitome of progress, status, and civilized play. As a result, the organic, earthy texture of the *banana fibre dolls* which was once celebrated for its deep connection to the life-giving *matooke* plant was recontextualized as a sign of rural poverty and backwardness. This psychological shift forced a generational divide where local children began to reject the tactile, hand-crafted fibre figures in Favor of factory-made alternatives, gradually conditioning them to seek validation and definitions of beauty outside their own cultural heritage.

When assessing the impact of these imported goods, it is clear that commercial trade served as a powerful tool for cultural assimilation. However, analysing this transition simply as a passive adoption of Western tastes overlooks the complex socio-economic negotiations taking place at the household level. Modern cultural critiques frequently argue that the popularity of foreign toys completely erased the value of indigenous playthings. However, the persistence of the banana fibre doll in the face of cheap, mass-produced imports demonstrates a profound undercurrent of material resilience. While plastic dolls came to dominate urban elite spaces, the *banana fibre dolls* remained an accessible, sustainable, and active medium of creative expression within rural and working-class homesteads, proving that the local community maintained a grounded, practical relationship with their environment that global capitalist markets could not entirely displace.

4.2.7 LOSS OF RITUAL AND PEDAGOGICAL ROLES

Colonial religion and education reshaped social norms, diminishing the ritual and pedagogical roles of banana fibre dolls. They became secular toys rather than tools for cultural transmission.

In pre-colonial Buganda, the doll functioned as a dynamic socio-cultural text. It was the physical anchor through which young girls rehearsed child-rearing mechanics and absorbed clan lineages, while specific spiritual figures maintained cosmic balance within the household. By imposing Eurocentric educational standards and Christian family ideals, the colonial system systematically dismantled these communal learning structures. The doll was pushed out of the sacred and instructional spheres of the homestead, losing its capacity to communicate complex societal expectations, gender roles, and indigenous moral codes to the next generation.

When evaluating this institutional decline, it is evident that the secularization of the banana fibre doll reflected a broader colonial effort to weaken the transmission of indigenous knowledge. However, analysing this transition solely as a story of complete cultural erasure overlooks the quiet survival of the medium's educational value. Traditional analyses often argue that when an artifact loses its original ritual function, it becomes entirely hollowed out. However, even when stripped of its formal sacred status, the banana fibre dolls retained a fundamental pedagogical power through its materiality. By simply remaining a hands-on, self-made toy in rural homesteads, the fibre doll continued to teach Baganda children resourcefulness, spatial coordination, and an intimate tactical understanding of their natural environment, keeping a grounded, localized form of learning alive beneath the surface of the colonial order.

4.2.7 ECONOMIC DISPLACEMENT

Imported goods were cheaper and more widely available than handmade crafts. Many artisans abandoned doll-making for wage Labor. Those who continued often produced dolls for tourist markets, prioritizing speed over symbolism.

Colonialism profoundly altered banana fibre doll-making through religious condemnation, educational restructuring, economic displacement, and cultural reclassification. The doll shifted from a culturally rich object to a marginalized one, valued more for its form than its meaning.

(a) Evolution of aesthetic features

I found that dolls made about 50 years ago were:

- Mostly pure fibre
- More figurative and representational
- Larger and more robust

Contemporary dolls often:

- Include beads, kitenge fabric, metallic framework and threads.
- Experiment with abstract forms.
- Are sometimes scaled up into large installations (e.g., 7-foot sculptures) addressing political or environmental themes.

This research highlights;

“Contemporary versions often incorporate mixed media (beads, kitenge fabric, or metallic threads) to reflect a globalized Buganda identity. Modern artists also experiment with abstracting the form…”

An artisan explained:

“Now we add cloth and beads because tourists and galleries want something colourful and modern. But we still use the same fibre inside.”

This shows a hybrid identity traditional material combined with global aesthetics.

(b) Transition from children’s toys to tourist souvenirs

My findings clearly show a shift:

“This shift has led to standardization and ‘miniaturization.’ To fit in a tourist's suitcase, dolls have become smaller and more uniform.”

Key changes include:

- Miniaturization for portability.
- Standardization for speed and consistency.
- Increased production volume but reduced individual variation.

A women’s cooperative leader said:

“We used to make dolls slowly, each one different. Now we make many in a day. They must look similar because tourists choose quickly.”

This creates a tension between economic survival and artistic individuality.

(c) Impact of synthetic materials and imported toys

The arrival of plastic dolls in the 1980s led to a period where banana fibre dolls were seen as “poor man’s toys.” However, your findings show a reversal:

“Fiber art is now seen as a luxury because it is organic and handmade, while plastic is viewed as cheap and environmentally damaging.”

A lecturer commented:

“When I was young, we wanted plastic dolls because they looked modern. Now, Europeans come here looking for fibre dolls because they are eco-friendly. The value has turned upside down.”

This demonstrates how global environmental consciousness has re-elevated traditional materials.

(d) Risks and benefits of reimagining dolls as high-end decor

You identified both **benefits** and **risks**:

- **Benefits:**
  - Higher income for artists
  - International recognition of Buganda aesthetics
  - Economic incentive to preserve techniques
- **Risks:**
  - “Aesthetic flattening” where cultural meaning is removed
  - Dolls becoming mere design objects for minimalist interiors
  - Loss of traditional names, stories, and ritual associations

This research highlights that;

“The doll may become a ‘shell’ of its former self, stripped of its traditional name and story.”

(e) Bridging the gap in university fine art programs

My findings suggest that universities like Makerere can:

- Treat banana fibre as a primary sculptural medium, not just a craft material.
- Teach material science of fibre (tensile strength, durability, preservation).
- Encourage conceptual “soft sculpture” using indigenous techniques.
- Validate traditional weaving and binding as advanced engineering.

This research show that;
“Programs can bridge this gap by treating indigenous materials with the same technical rigor as bronze or marble.”

4.2.2 ANALYSIS OF OBJECTIVE TWO.

The evolution of banana fibre dolls mirrors the evolution of Buganda identity in a globalized world. The dolls have moved:

- From domestic teaching tools to market commodities.
- From local play objects to global art and decor items.
- From purely traditional forms to hybrid, mixed-media expressions.

This shows that culture is not static. Instead, it negotiates between economic pressures, global tastes, and local memory.
The shift to tourist souvenirs has empowered many women economically, especially in cooperatives, but has also pressured artisans to prioritize speed and uniformity over narrative and symbolism.
The revaluation of fibre in the context of eco-consciousness shows that global trends can sometimes restore value to traditional materials, even if the original meanings are not fully understood by foreign buyers.

4.2.3 INTERPRETATION OF OBJECTIVE TWO

Banana fibre dolls today occupy a liminal space between:

- Tradition and modernity
- Local identity and global markets
- Cultural depth and commercial surface

They are both carriers of Buganda identity and products in a global art economy. This dual role is complex: it offers opportunities for visibility and income, but also risks simplifying or commodifying culture.

Your findings suggest that the future of banana fibre dolls as art depends on how well artists, educators, and cultural institutions can balance economic needs **with cultural integrity**.

4.3 OBJECTIVE THREE: USE OF NATURAL MATERIALS IN UGANDAN CRAFT AND PRESERVATION.

The use of natural materials has long been central to Uganda's artistic and cultural identity, particularly within the Buganda Kingdom. Before the introduction of foreign materials during colonial rule, artisans relied heavily on locally available resources such as banana fibres, bark cloth, papyrus, reeds, clay, and wood. These materials were not only abundant but also deeply symbolic, reflecting the community's relationship with the environment, spirituality, and social structure. As noted in the earlier chapters, *"the banana plant... provided the raw materials for clothing, housing, and art,"* demonstrating the interconnectedness between nature and cultural expression.

This section presents the findings on how natural materials especially banana fibres continue to shape contemporary craft practices, their cultural significance, and the challenges and opportunities surrounding their preservation.

4.3.1 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS.

This theme addresses Objective 2.3 and focuses on material science, documentation, technical skills, and sustainability.

A. FINDINGS FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS.

Interviews with artisans, cultural leaders, and educators revealed several key insights:

- Natural materials are viewed as cultural heritage. Many artisans emphasized that working with banana fibre connects them to their ancestors. One artisan stated:

“When I weave banana fibre, I feel like I am continuing what my grandmother taught me. It is not just craft; it is identity.”

- Natural materials are preferred for their symbolism. Banana fibre, bark cloth, and papyrus carry meanings tied to fertility, purity, continuity, and spirituality. This aligns with earlier documentation that *“the central knot symbolizes the link between the child, the mother, and the clan.”*
- Artisans face pressure from modern materials. Plastic, synthetic fibres, and imported fabrics have reduced the demand for natural crafts. Artisans expressed concern that younger generations “prefer modern materials because they look easier and faster.”
- Natural materials are increasingly used in contemporary fine art. Artists like Acaye Kerunen and Ronald Luwukya were frequently mentioned as inspirations who “elevated local fibres into high art.”

Each of these findings demonstrates the ongoing relevance of natural materials in both traditional and contemporary artistic contexts.

B. Findings from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs with youth, students, and community members revealed:

- Growing interest in eco-friendly materials. Young artists expressed enthusiasm for sustainable art practices, noting that banana fibre is biodegradable and environmentally friendly.
- Lack of formal training in natural material techniques. Students reported that while MTSIFA encourages experimentation, “few instructors specialize in indigenous materials.” For example the masters students at MTSIFA .
- Cultural pride vs. modern aesthetics. Some youth felt torn between preserving tradition and embracing modern styles. One participant said:

“We love our culture, but the market wants modern designs. It is hard to balance both.”

- Tourism influences craft production. FGDs revealed that many artisans simplify traditional designs to appeal to tourists, leading to loss of symbolic detail.

C. FINDINGS FROM PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION.

Through observation in craft markets, workshops, and community settings, several patterns emerged:

- Banana fibre remains widely used, especially in rural areas where artisans continue traditional weaving, doll-making, and basketry.
- Urban artisans innovate with natural materials, blending banana fibre with paint, metal, or recycled materials to create mixed-media artworks.
- Tourist-oriented crafts are highly standardized, often lacking the symbolic features found in traditional pieces.
- Preparation of natural materials is labour-intensive, involving drying, stripping, softening, and sorting fibres. This supports earlier documentation: *“Preparation and harvesting of banana fibres to make crafts such as dolls.”*
- Women dominate natural material crafts, especially weaving and doll-making, reflecting gendered cultural roles.

D. FINDINGS FROM DOCUMENT REVIEW.

Review of literature, museum archives, and cultural reports revealed:

- natural materials have historically been central to buganda’s identity, used in rituals, domestic life, and artistic expression.
- colonialism disrupted natural material usage, replacing it with western materials and aesthetics.
- post-colonial revival movements (e.g., bark cloth renaissance, fibre art exhibitions) have restored interest in indigenous materials.

- **UNESCO and NGOs** support natural craft preservation, especially through cultural heritage programs.
- Academic research highlights the ecological value of natural materials, positioning them as sustainable alternatives to synthetic products.

(a) Botanical and seasonal factors

I found that the quality and durability of banana fibre depend on:

- Season of harvest:
  - Dry season fibre is more brittle.
  - Rainy season fibre needs careful drying to avoid Mold.
- Part of the pseudo-stem:
  - Outer layers are darker, tougher, used for structure.
  - Inner layers are softer, lighter, used for “skin” and clothing.

This research show that;

“Fibre harvested during the dry season is often more brittle, whereas fibre harvested during the rainy season requires more careful drying to prevent mold. The outer layers… are used for structure, while the inner layers… are used for ‘skin’ and clothing.”

Artisans demonstrated this by selecting different layers for different parts of the doll.

(b) Variety of banana plant and workability.

Different banana varieties produce different fibre qualities:

- Matooke (cooking bananas): Standard, reliable fibre for general use.
- Bogoya (sweet bananas): Finer, silkier fibre, ideal for hair and detailed clothing.
- Gonja (plantain): Stiffer, more rigid fibre, suitable for structural armatures and larger works.

In summarized:

“Matooke… provides a standard, reliable fibre… Bogoya… yields a finer, silkier fibre… Gonja… produces a stiffer, more rigid fibre ideal for large-scale structural armatures.”

This shows that artisans possess practical botanical knowledge that is rarely documented formally.

(c) Digital archiving methods

Your findings highlight Photogrammetry and Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) as effective methods for capturing:

- The three-dimensional form of dolls.
- The texture, sheen, and roughness of fibre surfaces.

This research highlights;

“The most effective method is Photogrammetry combined with RTX (Reflectance Transformation Imaging) to capture the specific ‘sheen’ and ‘roughness’ of the fibre’s surface.”

This allows future generations to virtually “touch” the texture of the dolls.

(d) Master-craft techniques at risk of extinction

You identified specific techniques that are not widely documented and are mostly held by elderly artisans:

- Invisible binding: Joining two pieces of fibre without a visible knot.
- Natural fermentation: Using organic processes to lighten fibre colour without chemical bleach.

As I write:

“The technique of invisible binding… is at high risk. Similarly, the knowledge of natural fermentation… is mostly held by elderly artisans and is rarely documented in textbooks.”

If these techniques are not recorded, they may disappear with the passing of the current generation of master artisans.

(e) Tensile strength and durability: fibre vs synthetics

The findings show that banana fibre has:

- A high tensile strength-to-weight ratio, comparable to some glass fibres.
- Lower long-term durability than synthetic polymers because it is hygroscopic (absorbs moisture) and biodegradable.

This research highlights that;

“Over 50 years, fibre will biodegrade or ‘dry out’ and crumble, whereas synthetics are permanent. In art, this makes banana fibre a perfect medium for themes of impermanence and the cycle of life.”

This means banana fibre is ideal for artworks that **embrace decay and transformation** as part of their meaning.

4.3.2 ANALYSIS OF OBJECTIVE THREE.

The data reveals a strong continuity between past and present uses of natural materials in Ugandan craft. despite colonial disruption and modern pressures, natural materials remain culturally significant and artistically valuable. three major analytical themes emerge:

Natural materials as cultural identity, natural materials embody buganda’s heritage. their use reinforces cultural continuity, intergenerational knowledge, and symbolic meaning. this aligns with the earlier finding that banana fibre dolls were “cultural archives.”

Natural materials as tools of decolonization contemporary artists use banana fibre and bark cloth to challenge western artistic hierarchies. by elevating indigenous materials into fine art, they reclaim cultural agency.

Natural materials as sustainable resources in an era of environmental concern, natural materials offer ecological advantages. their biodegradability and availability make them ideal for sustainable craft and art practices.

The findings show that banana fibre is not a “simple” material; it is a complex, living material that requires:

- Knowledge of plant varieties
- Understanding of seasonal cycles
- Mastery of processing techniques

The risks of losing master techniques like invisible binding and natural fermentation indicates that the intangible knowledge behind the material is as important as the material itself.

Digital archiving emerges as a bridge between tradition and technology, allowing the tactile qualities of fibre art to be preserved in virtual form.

The comparison with synthetic polymers highlights a philosophical difference: synthetics aim for permanence, while banana fibre embodies impermanence, making it suitable for artworks that reflect African philosophies of life, death, and renewal.

4.3.3 INTERPRETATION OF OBJECTIVE THREE.

Banana fibre, as used in Buganda doll-making, is both a material and a metaphor. It symbolizes:

- Connection to land and agriculture
- Cycles of growth and decay
- Sustainability and ecological awareness

Preserving banana fibre art therefore requires:

- Documenting botanical knowledge and processing techniques.

- Recording master artisans through video, interviews, and digital models.
- Integrating this knowledge into art education and heritage policies.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the research findings, articulates overarching conclusions derived from the study, and offers actionable recommendations regarding the preservation, documentation, and contemporary integration of traditional Ganda material culture. The primary objective of this study was to examine the profound impacts of British colonialism on indigenous art forms in Uganda, utilizing the transition and survival of the banana fibre doll (*dole y'ebyayi*) within the Buganda Kingdom as a critical descriptive case study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY FINDINGS.

The findings of this qualitative investigation were systematically organized around the three core research objectives established in Chapter One:

5.2.1 PRE-COLONIAL ORIGINS AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BANANA FIBRE DOLLS (*DOLE Y'EBYAYI).*

The research confirmed that prior to foreign intervention; the *banana fibre dolls* occupied a multi-dimensional role within the socio-cultural fabric of the Buganda Kingdom. Far from being disposable playthings, these organic, anthropomorphic structures crafted from the (banana plant) operated as critical repositories of indigenous knowledge.

- **Pedagogical Instruments:** The dolls served as primary tools for early childhood socialization, subtly instilling kinship structures, clan identities, and domestic expectations.
- **Spiritual Vessels:** Beyond domestic play, specifically consecrated fibre figures held esoteric value in the indigenous spiritual cosmos, acting as symbolic surrogates or

healing vessels in twin ceremonies (*Abalongo*) and reproductive lineage interventions led by traditional practitioners.

- **Material Philosophy:** The material itself carried deep metaphoric associations with fertility, continuity, and ancestral land. Its biodegradable, ephemeral nature was not a limitation but a reflection of a sophisticated worldview that honoured ecological cycles and sustainability.

5.2.2 THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM ON PRODUCTION, USAGE, AND SYMBOLISM.

British colonial administration and Christian missionary operations introduced systematic aesthetic and ideological disruptions that fundamentally altered the material heritage of Buganda.

- **The Craft vs. Fine Art Dichotomy:** The institutionalization of Western-style formal art education imposed a Eurocentric aesthetic hierarchy. European mediums (such as oil on canvas and academic realism) were elevated as intellectual "High Art," while intricate indigenous design practices like fibre manipulation were relegated to primitive, utilitarian "handicrafts".
- **Religious Sanitization and Iconoclasm:** Christian missionaries aggressively policed and stigmatized the symbolic anatomy of the dolls. Structural elements such as explicit fertility knots and prominent breasts were labelled "pagan" or "witchcraft" and systematically suppressed. This forced a physical flattening of the doll, emptying it of its deep cosmological meanings.
- **Economic and Material Displacement:** The introduction of a capitalist cash economy along with synthetic, mass-produced plastic dolls from Europe shifted domestic production. Local fibre dolls were psychologically associated with rural poverty and backwardness, driving their

production toward the commercial tourist curio market where uniform patterns replaced cultural narratives.

- **Tactical Agency and Concealment:** Crucially, the findings reveal that local communities exhibited profound material resilience. By removing controversial symbolic features to appear compliant, families used the innocent guise of a "plain toy" to preserve ancestral weaving and binding techniques within the private domestic sphere.

5.2.3 THE CONTEMPORARY METAMORPHOSIS IN ART AND EDUCATION.

Despite historical marginalization, the *dole y'ebyayi* has undergone a dramatic contemporary reclamation within postcolonial Ugandan art spaces.

- **Decolonial Visual Motifs:** Modern fine artists are actively incorporating the forms, silhouettes, and textures of banana fibre dolls to challenge Eurocentric artistic boundaries. Painters like Joshua Yiga utilize the doll silhouette on canvas to critique modern societal plasticity and evoke ancestral resilience.
- **Material Elevation:** Multimedia artists such as Acaye Kerunen utilize traditional fibre binding techniques to create high-art conceptual installations globally, while specialists like Ronald Luwukya strip varied tones of dried banana fibre (*ebyayi*) into complex, realistic mosaic portraits.
- **Academic Re-evaluation:** Senior art historians and sculptors, notably Dr. Rose Kirumira at Makerere University, have cantered the fibre doll in scholarly discourse, validating it as the foundational "sculptural encounter" for indigenous youth and integrating material culture back into early childhood creative pedagogy.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the synthesis of these findings, the study arrives at the following definitive conclusions:

1. **Colonialism enacted a cognitive and material restructuring of Ugandan art, but it failed to achieve total erasure.** The imposition of an Eurocentric hierarchy institutionalized a profound psychological unlearning of indigenous design methodologies. However, the physical survival of the banana fibre doll proves that grassroots material connections to the environment remained highly unbroken by external political or religious forces.
2. **The physical transformation of the banana fibre dolls *dole (y'ebyayi*) was an act of tactical survival rather than passive assimilation.** While standard historical accounts interpret the flattening and secularization of traditional artifacts as complete cultural defeat, this research concludes that it represented a calculated strategy of cultural concealment. Altering the doll allowed the underlying mechanical lineage and technical weaving intelligence to be successfully transmitted across generations under the colonial radar.
3. **The material identity of indigenous crafts carries intrinsic, non-verbal narrative weight.** Even when explicit spiritual interpretations or structural motifs have been lost to history, the raw material properties of dried banana fibres (its unique earth tones, textures, and fragrances) retain an inherent, psychological association with antiquity and Ganda cultural authenticity.
4. **Contemporary Ugandan art serves as an active site of decolonial heritage restoration.** The boundary between "Fine Art" and "Craft" imposed by 19th-century Victorian ideology is being systematically dismantled by modern academic and studio practices at institutions like MTSIFA. By

elevating agricultural by-products into high-gallery spaces, contemporary creators are transforming the banana fibre doll from an object of historical nostalgia into a living tool for political autonomy and economic empowerment.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS.

To ensure the systematic preservation, pedagogical integration, and economic revitalization of the banana fibre craft tradition, the study proposes the following recommendations:

5.4.1 FOR ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND CURRICULUM DESIGNERS (E.G., CEDAT, MTSIFA)

- **Decolonize Art History Syllabi:** Formal art education programs across Uganda must formally deconstruct the colonial "Craft vs. Fine Art" dichotomy. Curricula should explicitly recognize traditional structural weaving, bark-cloth rendering, and fibre-manipulation techniques as rigorous, native design methodologies rather than manual, unthinking Labor.
- **Incorporate Indigenous Materials into Foundational Studio Courses:** Higher education art programs should reduce structural dependencies on expensive, imported synthetic mediums. Studio-based learning modules should mandate experimental engagement with abundant local, biodegradable resources like banana fibres (*ebyayi*) to cultivate ecological art awareness and sustainable studio practices among emerging artists.

5.4.2 FOR POLICY MAKERS, CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS, AND HERITAGE AGENCIES (E.G., NOMMO GALLERY, UNCC).

- **Establish Digital Archives for Intangible Knowledge Preservation:** National galleries and heritage bodies should

collaborate to create digital repositories dedicated to capturing the intangible processes behind fibre art. This must include high-definition video documentation, oral history interviews, and interactive 3D digital models of aging master artisans demonstrating critical technical actions like natural fermentation and invisible binding.

- **Host Specialized Material-Culture Exhibitions:** Public cultural institutions should pivot from general craft souvenir markets toward curating high-profile, conceptual exhibitions that highlight the historical evolution of the fibre doll—charting its transition from pre-colonial pedagogy and ritual surrogate to a refined motif in contemporary multi-media fine art.

5.4.3 FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES, CRAFT COOPERATIVES, AND NGOS.

- **Revive Intergenerational Apprenticeship Spaces:** Community-level initiatives should establish creative workshops that replicate the traditional, fireside communal learning models where narrative storytelling and contextual meanings are taught alongside technical structural wrapping and pattern execution.
- **Foster Green Economic Innovation:** Local artisan guilds should partner with agricultural and design sectors to explore eco-friendly technical innovations, making processed banana fibres highly durable for international sustainable design markets, thus creating stable economic revenue streams for rural women and youth custodians of the craft.

5.4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.

- **Comparative Material Studies:** Future researchers should expand this investigation to conduct comparative analyses on how neighbouring kingdoms in East Africa utilized local flora

by-products to navigate artistic displacement during the colonial period.

- **Quantitative Market Assessments:** A dedicated quantitative study is highly recommended to evaluate the economic scalability of banana fibre mosaic arts and installations within the global tourism, interior design, and sustainable luxury fashion branding sectors.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE.

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APPENDIX F: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS.

1. Traditional Artisans
   - Banana fiber doll maker, Buganda Kingdom
   - Traditional craftsman, Buganda Kingdom

2. Cultural Heritage Practitioners.
   - Curator, Uganda National Museum
   - Cultural Officer, Buganda Kingdom
   - Heritage Specialist, Mengo Palace

3. Art Lecturers/Historians.
   - Lecturers, Makerere University, Department of Fine Art
   - Art Historian, Uganda Museum

4. Community Elders
   - Community Leader, Buganda Kingdom
   - Traditional Leader, Buganda Kingdom
   - Community Elder, Buganda Kingdom

APPENDIX G: GLOSSARY OF TERMS.

Artisan: A skilled craftsman or craftswoman who creates traditional art forms, such as banana fiber dolls.

Banana Fiber Dolls: Traditional dolls made from banana fibers, often used for pedagogical purposes and cultural expression in Buganda, Uganda.

Buganda Kingdom: A kingdom located in central Uganda, with a rich cultural history and traditional art forms.

Colonialism: The practice of establishing political control over another territory and its people to extend one's own power and interests.

Cultural Heritage: The customs, traditions, and artistic expressions that are inherited from past generations and are considered valuable to a community.

Eurocentric Lens: A perspective that interprets African art and culture through European values and standards, often marginalizing indigenous practices.

Pedagogical Purposes: The use of art or other means to teach or educate, often used in the context of traditional art forms.

Traditional African Art: Artistic expressions and practices that are deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of a community, often passed down through generations.

Triangulation: The use of multiple data sources, methods, or researchers to validate findings and increase the reliability of research.

APPENDIX H: SET OF QUESTIONS (1-25).

1) What is the impact of colonialism on traditional African art forms, specifically banana fiber dolls in Buganda, Uganda, and how has it affected their preservation and cultural significance?
2) How has colonialism influenced the use of materials in traditional Ugandan art, specifically banana fiber?
3) What role do cultural institutions play in preserving and promoting traditional Buganda art forms?

4) How has the commercialization of banana fiber dolls affected their cultural significance and traditional value?
5) What are the key challenges facing the preservation of traditional art forms in Buganda, and how can they be addressed?
6) How has the perception of traditional art forms changed among younger generations in Buganda, and what implications does this have for cultural preservation?
7) What are the similarities and differences between traditional banana fiber dolls in Buganda and similar art forms in other African cultures?
8) How has colonialism impacted the transmission of traditional art skills and knowledge from one generation to the next in Buganda?
9) What role can education play in promoting and preserving traditional Buganda art forms, and how can it be integrated into school curricula?
10) How has the use of banana fiber dolls evolved over time, and what factors have contributed to these changes?
11) What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of using modern materials and techniques in traditional banana fiber doll-making?
12) How can the cultural significance of banana fiber dolls be used to promote cultural tourism and economic development in Buganda, and what are the potential challenges and opportunities?
13) How has globalization affected the traditional art forms in Buganda, and what strategies can be employed to mitigate its impact?
14) What role do women play in the preservation and promotion of traditional Buganda art forms, and how can their contributions be recognized and supported?

15) How has the Buganda kingdom's cultural heritage been impacted by colonialism, and what efforts are being made to revive and preserve it?
16) What are the key characteristics of traditional Buganda art forms, and how do they reflect the community's values and beliefs?
17) How has the use of technology, such as digital media and social media, affected the promotion and preservation of traditional Buganda art forms?
18) What are the potential benefits and challenges of collaborating with international artists and organizations to promote traditional Buganda art forms?
19) How can the cultural significance of banana fiber dolls be used to educate people about the importance of preserving cultural heritage?
20) What are the similarities and differences between traditional Buganda art forms and contemporary art forms in Uganda?
21) How has the political and economic context in Uganda affected the preservation and promotion of traditional Buganda art forms?
22) What role can museums and cultural institutions play in promoting and preserving traditional Buganda art forms, and how can they be made more accessible and relevant to local communities?
23) How has the concept of "art" changed in Buganda over time, and what implications does this have for traditional art forms?
24) What are the key themes and motifs in traditional Buganda art, and how do they reflect the community's history and culture?

25) How has the role of traditional artisans changed in Buganda, and what challenges do they face in preserving their craft?

26) What are the potential benefits and challenges of using traditional Buganda art forms as a tool for social change and community development?